

## **Père Henri Bazot**



**1923 - - 2016**

**H**enri was born on the 1st October 1923 in the shadow of Bourges Cathedral where he was baptised. The family home was in the centre of Bourges not far from the Cathedral. His parents were well off business people. They ran a modest cafe, confectionary, and ice cream shop on a corner. However, they employed around a dozen workers. Henri's father had a delivery van with a driver and the latest sedan type of car. Henri had an older sister born in 1921 who died in a half-deserted clinic on the 2nd July 1940 during the rout that followed the German invasion. Henri always said that it gave his mother the shock of her life. Four other children followed the birth of Henri.

Henri did his primary schooling in Bourges, at the La Salle boarding school. Music lessons interrupted his studies three times a week. His father was a musician and loved music. Each of the children had an instrument, piano, cello, or violin, which was Henri's instrument. He said himself that he was brilliant and performed from memory Beethoven's Violin Concerto before an audience of parents at the School of Music when he was 12 years old. His father dreamed to see him admitted to the Conservatory and in fact, he was accepted. However, the poor father was disappointed as Henri, after gaining a double Baccalaureate, opted to go to the Sorbonne to study English.

In 1943, Henri decided to enter the White Fathers. He was a leader of a group of Young Christian Students and it was because of this that he reflected seriously about his vocation. He followed the usual training course of the White Fathers but in many different places, Béruges, France for Philosophy, Maison Carrée near Algiers for novitiate and Altkirch in France, Thibar, and Carthage in Tunisia for Theology. He took his Missionary Oath at Thibar on the 29th June 1949 and he was ordained priest at Carthage on the 1st February 1950. Then there followed his first appointment or rather a series of appointments ornamented by lots of meanderings. Henri left us a summary of his life that allows us follow the main events.

Fr. Bazot wished for an appointment to a non-Islamic, non-French territory practicing African Traditional Religion. In fact, he was sent to Rayak in the Lebanon. It was an Arabic speaking area where Islam was solidly anchored. He accepted and began to learn spoken Arabic. He managed not only to manage at street level and at school but also to celebrate in the Oriental rite in Arabic and Greek. In 1952, he received a second appointment: to North Africa. He started to learn 'real' Arabic, as he put it, at La Manouba. However when Bishop Louis

Durrieu (+1965), the Superior General, visited Tunis, he complained and received yet another appointment.

Henri arrived in Rwanda in October 1953. His dream was fulfilled, a non-French country, not much Islam, and where one could meet believers of traditional religion. Straight away, he got down to work in many different areas: he was director of a Vocational School for Carpentry and Sewing, Catechumenate and Parish Priest. Already the first ethnic troubles began to emerge in 1959 and grew to major crises in 1964 and 1974. Worn out, he spent a year as curate in a parish in his home diocese of Bourges.

Fr. Bazot returned to Africa in 1975, this time to Burundi where he served as Parish Priest at Kibumbu and then at Gitaramuka. With so many others, he was expelled in July 1979. He accepted an appointment to our retirement home in Tassy. He spent a number of happy years there devoting himself to the care of the elderly confreres. He organised trips, which were very much appreciated by the confreres who held him in high esteem.

However, Henri still had the African bug. He met Bishop Spaita, a Zambian Bishop, in Paris. The Bishop invited him to work in his diocese. He spent a few months in Ireland brushing up his English with a view to an appointment to an English speaking country. However when his appointment came in 1984, it was to the then Zaire, Bunia firstly, then Goma and Bukavu. He did the Session/Retreat in Jerusalem in 1987

Henri returned definitively to France in April 1991. He was 70 years old. He spent a year in rue de Printemps before taking up the job of local bursar at the Provincial House. He was to spend 12 years there. He told us that these were happy days at the service of confreres, which prepared him for happy and tranquil days at Billère from 2003 to 2016.

Henri's apostolic life was stormy. He was forced to leave Rwanda and he was expelled from Burundi. However, he had a great facility for learning languages and he could speak them well. This meant that his superiors could appoint him quickly to different places in emergencies when a confrere got sick.

In Billère, Henri, as throughout his life, showed himself to be a cultivated confrere as his collection of books and discs testify. He was also very open and, as long as his health permitted, he liked to travel to foreign parts. He was self-confident and was not afraid to say who he was. He asserted his faith and sometimes his doubts concerning his faith in a very personal way. This sometimes led to friction in the community. However, he quickly toned down one or another of his ideas. The last weeks of his life were very painful. In his suffering, he called on the Lord to call him. His wish was fulfilled on the 23rd June 2016 and he left us peacefully.

Jean-Marie Vasseur

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